

TESTIMONY TO THE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

MONDAY, February 28, 2011

Good evening. I am Joanne R. Wolfertz, Vice-President and Dean of St. Vincent's College, located in Bridgeport. I am here tonight to ask that the elimination of the Connecticut Independent Colleges Grant and Scholarship Program, CICS, contained in Governor Malloy's budget proposal, be considered for continued funding at its current level.

St. Vincent's is a private college dedicated to providing degree and certificate programs in nursing and allied health and growing, in part, to student recognition of the stability of healthcare employment, the inability of public colleges to expand their healthcare programs due to budgetary constraints, and recognition of the quality of St. Vincent's graduates.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services forecasts a shortage in Connecticut of almost 22,000 nurses by 2020. Additional healthcare workers in the state will retire or leave the healthcare workforce during this same period of time. A recent Health Care Industry Cluster study concluded that predictions of nursing shortages and others in the healthcare workforce in the Southwest region of the state will be the most important issue affecting the future of healthcare in our region. I would be remiss if I did not note that St. Vincent's College, along with our sister private colleges and universities, prepare nearly half of the nurses and allied health professionals licensed each year in our state.

Allow me to tell you about the students at St. Vincent's College:

- Over 50% of our students are from the Greater Bridgeport area and represent the next wave of our healthcare professionals;
- Based on graduate reports, more than 95% of St. Vincent's graduates seek employment in the state;
- Their average age is 28.8 years ;
- They include individuals seeking a second career now that their former employer has moved out of state, offshore, or downsized;
- Many are single mothers and fathers seeking to earn a degree that will lead to a better paying job that will allow them to support a family;
- 100+ students will be graduating in May 2011 and joining the healthcare workforce in the state;
- At least 1,923 St. Vincent alumni, employed in healthcare in Connecticut, are tax payers;
- Over 27% of our students are minorities, residing locally.

Impact of Eliminating CICS Funding

Cutting CICS funding will force students to assume more debt or to forego an education in healthcare. Federal and state need-based aid is critical for these students, who cannot do it alone. This Academic Year:

- 315 St. Vincent's students received CICS funding in the amount of \$380,000;

- The College provided an 82% match to those funds;
- More than 70% of our students have assumed significant loans to meet their educational costs, in addition to working part-time;
- Unlike the state's public colleges, the only state aid that comes to the private colleges is the CICS program, grants that are given only to state residents – the graduates most likely to remain in the state.

I believe that eliminating CICS funding for private college students in this state puts the dream of a college education further beyond the reach of our poorest citizens. This is happening at a time when we need to be preparing the workforce of the future: a workforce comprised of state residents who, if given a choice, will remain in Connecticut, fill the positions that will help grow the economy, and pay taxes. CICS funding is a solid and wise investment in the state's students who will generate a greater return on our investment.

I respectfully urge that CICS funding to private college students be maintained at the current level for their benefit and for that of our communities. Thank you.

Respectfully,



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